

## **Turning Research into Classroom Practice: AKA “So What!?”**

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Turning Research into Classroom Practice: AKA “So What!?” is a bridge to disseminate research into the classroom. A research informed instructor is an up-to-date instructor! In this feature, an article from the Fashion discipline of Family and Consumer Sciences is examined. A quick review of the article is followed by real and practical applications that can be incorporated into the classroom.

### **Article citation:**

Bhardwaj, V. & Fairhurst, A. (2010). Fast Fashion: response to changes in the fashion industry. *The International Review of Retail, Distribution and Consumer Research*, (Vol. 20:1), 165-173.

### **Quick review of the article:**

The authors begin with a discussion about the evolution of the fashion industry, with particular attention to the last 20 years. One specific trend is “throwaway fashion”, aka “fast fashion”. Competitiveness has increased, causing the industry to change and evolve. Factors affecting these changes include:

- Mass production
- Increase in number of fashion seasons
- Supply chain modifications
- Desire for low cost
- Desire for flexible designs
- Desire for quality
- Desire for speedy delivery to the market

Historically, forecasting and ready-to-wear fashion involved unveiling fashion quite a bit of time before it would enter the market. Currently, speed to market has increased and “quick fashion” has resulted in a reduction in production time. In the highly competitive market, this fast fashion has caused greater turnover in stores, smaller collections, shorter life cycle for the fashion, but higher profit margins due to lack of markdown time.

The authors’ purpose for the paper was to review changes in fashion in the last two decades (since the 1990s) with specific attention to fast fashion and its pervasiveness. The business environment has changed and evolved and as such, the industry has changed. A review of literature (overview) covers discussion points on the following:

- Until the 1980s, fashion was based on low cost, mass production, and standardized styles with little change
- Fashion life cycle followed 4 stages:
  - Introduction and adoption by leaders
  - Growth and increase in acceptance
  - Conformity (maturation)

- Decline and obsolescence
- Fashion seasons were: spring/summer and autumn/winter
- In the 1990s, focus moved to product expansion, faster response to fashion changes, refreshing products, increasing variety, and adding more seasons (mid-seasons), smaller batches, reduced time in production
- Outsourcing became more popular due to low labor costs (despite longer lead times, complications in supply chains, issues with importing, and product inconsistencies)
- In the 1990s, quick response (QR) became an important strategy
- Fast fashion describes manufacturers “speed to market” approach
- Runway shows received more exposure due to popular magazines, photographers, and the web
- Retailers were able to adopt fashion more quickly due to the above-mentioned exposure
- The UK industry, strong players in the market, also shifted to outsourcing to increase profits
- Just in time (JIT), Computer integrated manufacturing (CIM) and total quality management (TQM) became more important in the late 1990s and early 2000s

Fast fashion has received a lot of attention both from the buyer and supplier perspectives. The approach shifts from production-driven to market-driven processes with retailers noting the quick response to the markets. Past research in the area has focused primarily on lead-time reduction. Several factors have assisted in this reduction, including CAD (computer aided design) programs and EDI (electronic data interchange). Not only have suppliers been affected, but consumers have become more demanding as well. Consumers are more focused on fashion and this in turn causes retailers to consider consumer behavior and opinions on fast fashion. Little research has been completed on the relationship between fast fashion and consumers.

Consumers are exposed to fashion on more levels, as mentioned before due to the web, fashion shows, and global influences. The fast fashion approach further allows more turnover of items, especially in the Generation Y population who prefer more affordable clothes, even if quality is lower. Conservative consumers, however, may view fast fashion as a waste, preferring to buy fewer higher quality items at higher prices.

Authors conclude by discussing future research in fast fashion. They list several areas which could serve as useful research areas including: exclusivity, price-consciousness, hoarding merchandise for future use, consumers’ perceived risk due to trade-off between quality and price, consumer expectation and satisfaction after the consumption process, and consumers’ efficiency in terms of cost-benefit analysis. They also note the importance of environmental concerns, green market, organic clothing, fair trade, etc. Researchers might also study whether consumers would pay more for “green” fashion!

Practice or “So What! ?”... how can I apply this in my classroom?:

Students and faculty in the Fashion discipline can draw on points made in this article. Fast fashion and changes in the industry are important parts of being a professional. The following are activities in which students can further learn about these issues in fashion:

- a) Ask students to go to a popular store and look at the amount of items on sale versus regular price. What season is on sale? What season is it? Ask store employees about turnover of displays, etc.
- b) Have students interview a person who works in the fashion industry. What are their feelings about “fast fashion”? How is it affecting their business and their day-to-day operations?
- c) Have students research the Internet to investigate the types of things that are on sale on major retailers’ websites.
- d) Have a speaker from the fashion industry come in and speak to the class about fast fashion and production changes in recent years.
- e) If possible, arrange a tour of a fashion manufacturing plant or fashion warehouse. How are the items arranged in the factory? Ask workers to discuss turnover, storage, timelines, etc.
- f) Ask students to discuss their views on outsourcing. What are the pros and cons? How can America be more competitive in the manufacturing arena?
- g) Organize students in small groups. Ask them to prepare a plan for timing of runway shows, manufacturing and selling for the “new” seasons of fashion. What is the planning time? How long would each step take?
- h) Break students into small groups. Assign various roles to each group and have them prepare their side of the argument (ex: suppliers, buyers, designers, consumers).
- i) Ask students to look at the tags of their clothing. Where were they manufactured? What are the countries covered in the classroom? What are the implications for the American manufacturing market? Are any items made in America?
- j) Have students find an article of clothing from their closet that they have had a while. Where was it made? When was it purchased? How long do they think it was on the sales floor? What did they pay for it? What season was it intended for?
- k) Ask students to compare their generation with other generations and views of fast fashion. For example, how often do they buy clothes, versus their mothers or grandmothers? What are the generational differences?
- l) Have students discuss how manufacturing could be more environmentally friendly. Do they think consumers are willing to pay more for such merchandise? Are they willing to pay more? Are their family members?
- m) Have students discuss the 4 stages of product adoption. Identify a recent trend and discuss the timeline and the 4 stages.